

Bringing Montana's Communication System into the 21st Century

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Digital communications in Montana is receiving a big boost thanks to a joint effort between the 341st Missile Wing, Malmstrom Air Force Base, and the Montana National Guard. The Interoperability Project is the name of a new communications project aiming to bring central Montana communications into the 21st century.

When it comes to safety, communication is key. That's why efforts are being made to expand Montana's current communications system. The 341st Missile Wing is installing a new antenna and radio site atop Highwood Baldy as part of the Interoperability Montana project.

Dave Cunningham, Public Affairs Officer for Lewis and Clark County, explains, "Well I think the ultimate goal will be for the state of Montana, and other states in the nation are also undergoing the same type of effort, to have this digital radio system, so that you can have agencies talking to one another, so that you can have people in different parts of states speaking with one another."

Due to the large amount of building materials and equipment needed to install the new system, the Montana Army National Guard was called upon to assist in the construction. The rough terrain at the site made it necessary to utilize a CH-47 Chinook helicopter for transportation and lift missions.

CW4 David Fuller, Pilot and Safety Officer for MANG, says, "Because of the rough terrain, and the road going up, it was best for use of a helicopter, to get all the stuff and equipment up on top of the mountain."

Many organizations and agencies will benefit from the installation of this new system, and public entities will benefit as it provides another link to the interoperability backbone for digital communications that will soon be available throughout the state.

Vince Kolar, Emergency Manager for Cascade County, says, "Ultimately it's to have communication statewide, not only voice communication, but also data communication at mobile data terminals."

Dave Cunningham adds, "You can hypothetically have a person responding from Kalispell and Billings and Great Falls, to an incident by Bozeman, and being able to speak to one another while they're en route, or receive information while they're en route."

Construction of the new communication suite began August 13th, and is expected to be complete by the first week of September. For more information, head to www.interop.mt.gov.

<http://www.kfbb.com/news/local/54022542.html>